WALL STREET JOURNAL
21 February 1985



# A Defector's Tale

Bookshelf

*"Breaking With Moscow"*
*By Arkady N. Shevchenko*

By William Kucewicz

The memoirs of Arkady N. Shevchenko have made a big media splash. He is billed as "the highest-ranking Soviet official ever to defect." His tale has been told on the front page of the New York Times, on CBS's "60 Minutes" and in Time magazine's lengthy excerpts from his book. To judge by all the hoopla, it would seem the West has laid hands on another Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

Not quite. Mr. Shevchenko doesn't have the gift of engaging prose, and he was, after all, only a high-ranking Soviet *bureaucrat*, not a Politburo decision maker. He sometimes seems to exaggerate his own importance and depth of knowledge. Indeed, some U.S. intelligence experts question a few of Mr. Shevchenko's observations, especially his knowledge of the internal workings of the KGB.

Nonetheless, "Breaking With Moscow" (Knopf, 378 pages, $18.95) is well worth reading. Mr. Shevchenko did have considerable contact with the Kremlin chieftains, especially when he was "personal adviser" to foreign minister Andrei Gromyko in the early 1970s and later as under secretary general of the United Nations. His book contains valuable information. One just has to choose carefully.

The book opens with Mr. Shevchenko's distinctly unsatisfying account of his courageous decision to defect to the West. For all his disgust with the "hypocrisy and corruption" of the Soviet leadership, he says too little about his final decision to turn secretly against the Kremlin and seek a haven in the U.S., becoming, for a time, a "reluctant" spy for the Central Intelligence Agency. He does tell us what it is like to be an informant. There are secret meetings at "safe houses," there is microfilm stuffed into a razor handle and there is the constant fear of being caught.

In the end, Soviet counterintelligence apparently did discover Mr. Shevchenko's double life. After receiving a vague request from Soviet authorities that he return to Moscow, he told his CIA contacts that the time had come for him to defect or face probable execution.

Mr. Shevchenko seems to have had a realistic view of what he was doing. He says that he "didn't idolize American society"; he knew that many Soviet emigres "had found hard lives and sadness here." On the other hand, he says, "I sat at the same table with Brezhnev, Gromyko, and other members of the Politburo, and I learned a great deal about the men who were the masters of the Soviet Union. I saw how easily they called vice virtue, and just as easily reversed the words again. How their hypocrisy and corruption had penetrated the smallest aspects of their lives, how isolated they were from the population they ruled."

Indeed, his best insights are contained in his account of the 22 years he spent working for the Soviet foreign ministry, until his defection in 1978. In East-West matters, he avers, the Kremlin leadership has a "double-handed approach." In 1972, for instance, the Soviet Union signed an international treaty abolishing biological weapons. Yet the Soviet military never abandoned its biological warfare program. At the U.N., Mr. Shevchenko was directed to "assist" what he describes as the "Soviet-controlled" World Peace Council, a group that railed against the Pentagon but ignored the Soviet Union's own massive military buildup.

Of great importance as we head toward new arms talks this spring are Mr. Shevchenko's comments that suggest that the Kremlin leadership may view arms-control agreements as shams and decoys. Mr. Shevchenko quotes Leonid Brezhnev as saying "detente does not in the slightest abolish, nor can it abolish or alter, the laws of the class struggle."

Mr. Shevchenko concludes, in his own words, that "Detente was viewed by the U.S.S.R. not only as a temporary measure, but also as a selective policy. The Politburo assumed it to be a tactical maneuver for a certain period of time that would in no way supersede the Marxist-Leninist idea of the final victory of the world-wide revolutionary process."

Although many of Mr. Shevchenko's observations ring true, others are disturbingly naive or contradictory. He says, for example, that "Khrushchev's unmasking of Stalin, in his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, wounded me deeply. . . . All that had been sacred for me before—the genius of Stalin, the infallibility and vision of the Party, its justness, its concern for the fate of the people and the country—seemed false."

Mr. Shevchenko was only 26 years old at the time. But in Stalin's Soviet Union, that should have been old enough to know of the purges, the prisons, the labor camps and the executions.

In his portrayal of Mr. Gromyko, moreover, he says that this elderly "political bulldog" will "again try to restore the Soviet-American relations to a normal level, even if he must do it 'brick by brick.'" Some seven pages later, however, he relates that in July 1972, at the U.N., Mr. Gromyko "instructed me to concoct a proposition that would permit us to use nuclear weapons against China and at the same time would not make it look as if we were abandoning our position on the prohibition of these arms." Mr. Shevchenko never reconciles that apparent contradiction.

Despite its shortcomings, much can be learned from Arkady Shevchenko's story of "Breaking With Moscow." It is a disturbing reminder of the evils that lurk behind the Kremlin walls.

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